

Richard Gardner Jr. House
32 West Chester Street
Nantucket
Nantucket County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-839

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10-NANT
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

RICHARD GARDNER JR. HOUSE

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Location: 32 West Chester Street (on south side of
West Chester Street), Nantucket, Massachusetts

Present Owner: Jessica S. Woodle (Mrs. Joseph C. Woodle)

Present Occupant: Woodle family

Present Use: Residence -- summer season

Brief Statement
of Significance: One of the first lean-to type dwellings built
at the site of the new settlement at Wesco
(Nantucket) in the early eighteenth century.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Built by Richard Gardner Jr. for his son Richard Gardner 3rd, a whaling captain who was lost at sea in 1725. (Abstract Nantucket Historical Ass'n Records). The next record which has been found shows that Valentine Pease sold to Priham Brock in 1822. He also was lost at sea, in 1823, and the house passed to his son Peter, whose widow, Abby J. Brock, on her death in 1908 left the house to Everett H. and Annie Brock Bowen. Annie Brock Bowen sold in 1925 to Brainerd T. Judkins, who deeded in 1926 to Edward F. Sanderson, who later in the same year sold to Francis H. B. Byrne. In 1949 Byrne sold to Eileen McCreary who in turn deeded the property to Jessica S. Woodle in 1951. Mrs. Woodle is the owner to date. (Abstract, Records of Town of Nantucket)
2. Date of erection: Between 1722 and 1724. (See Worth)
3. Architect: Unknown.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: The house was built facing due south and overlooking the Lily Pond, with its long back roof toward West Chester Street. At that time it was quite customary to set houses by the compass, with entrance door facing due south, completely disregarding surroundings such as direction of the adjacent street.

It is of the strict lean-to type. The corner posts and the oaken beams are exposed and the chimney and

fireplaces are massive. There are great beams, one in each corner of the room and four or five in the ceiling. The kitchen in the wing has sweep of roof almost to the ground -- the house has chimney closets, a bread oven and small "lights" over the bedroom doors.

At the top of the garret stair, one can observe the construction of the roof. Purlins cross horizontally from rafter to rafter, and the roof boards have been laid vertically. The house has natural wood floors.

The largest fireplace in the house is in the dining room and this one probably had an oven, as this room was usually the kitchen. The bed-chamber fireplace has built over it above the mantel, a cupboard with very old, irregular glass in its door.

5. Notes on alterations and additions: The stair with its turned newel post, balusters and molded handrail has received more attention than is usual in this period. Instead of the simple, sharply winding stair behind vertical sheathing found in such early houses, a different arrangement of treads provides a more comfortable ascent to the second floor. It is possible that an older stair wore out and that this stair is a replacement. The lights in or over the doors are probably a later addition. Two variations are seen in the parlor and library.

The under side of the winding garret stairs has been plastered in a smooth curve. The fireplace in the library with oven at the side was added years after the house was built.

About 1950 the interior was restored under the supervision of Ellery H. Peterson. The result of the work showed that the old timbers -- corner posts, summers and girts -- were in perfect condition, having been for years under layers of paint and paper. The fine old paneling was discovered under canvas and paper and is probably a later addition. A base has been painted across the paneling; the edges of the girts and summers are beaded. The fireplaces at that time were found unimpaired by the passage of time. There are exposed corner posts and oaken beams, a massive chimney and fireplaces; an ancient kitchen with fireplace and pots and crane.

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: In 1667 Richard Gardner was granted a large portion of of land -- a grant known as the "Crooked Record" due to the irregular shape of the plot on the surveyor's plan. In 1895 Myron Samuel Dudley wrote the following: "Crooked Record -- a true plot of the land of Richard Gardner adjoining his house, which was granted by the town July 25, 1673 and which he had then in possession ... recorded by Peter Folger clerk, 1676, -- confirmed by Proprietors, 1679." In 1779 it was discovered that the western line crossed the Gardner's Burying Ground. With these clues the location by Peter Folger was confirmed. (See Dudley)

Richard Gardner was an important person in the early colony, a leader with his brother John, in the Old North Vestry congregation, i.e. the Congregational Church.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: in "Nantucket Lands and Land Owners" by Henry Barnard Worth in Nantucket Historical Association Bulletin, v. 2, no. 1-7, 1901-1910; Ninety-five Per Cent Perfect by Everett Uberto Crosby, Nantucket, Inquirer and Mirror Press, 1937.

2. Bibliography

Dudley, Myron Samuel. Nantucket centennial celebration, 1695, 1795, 1895 historic sites and historic buildings. Nantucket: R. B. Hussey, 1895.

Duprey, Kenneth. Old Houses on Nantucket. New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co., Inc., 1959.

Fowlkes, George Allen. A Mirror of Nantucket, An Architectural History of The Island, 1686-1850. New Jersey: Press of Interstate, 1959.

Gardner, Miss Grace Brown. Scrapbooks. (unpublished collection, microfilm copy in Nantucket Atheneum). ca. 1925-1965.

Worth, Henry Barnard. Early Houses at Nantucket. Nantucket Historical Association Proceedings, 1904.

Prepared by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin
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PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of the Historic American Buildings Survey project on Nantucket, Massachusetts. This is part of a continuing HABS comprehensive survey of the early architecture and urban design of Nantucket financed by a grant from the Nantucket Historical Trust.

The project was under the general supervision of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Historical information was provided by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin of Nantucket, Massachusetts. Photographs are by Cervin Robinson, Pennsylvania. The material was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Mrs. Constance Werner Ramirez, July 1971.